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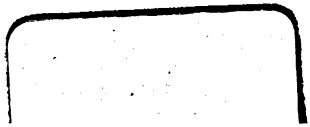
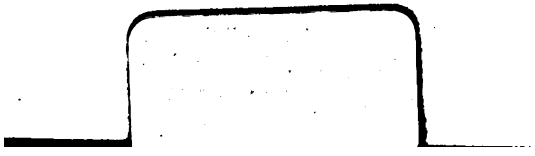
METHODISM

Its History, Teaching and Government

GEORGE STANLEY FRAZER





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CHRIST CHURCH COLLEGE, OXFORD, THE CRADLE OF METHODISM.

METHODISM

Its History, Teaching, and Government

BY

GEORGE STANLEY FRAZER

Author of Christianity and the Man of To-Day, Etc.

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY

BISHOP WILLIAM FRASER MCDOWELL

of the Methodist Episcopal Church

AND

BISHOP EDWIN DUBOSE MOUZON

of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South

NASHVILLE, TENN.
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My Mother
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Author's Foreword

IN presenting this little study of "Methodism: Its History, Teaching, and Government," it is not with the idea that it possesses any rare literary charm, or insight into the meaning of history or doctrine. For a number of years the author has felt the need of a small volume which would contain the essential things concerning the history, teaching, and government of the Methodist movement. The average man has little time or inclination to search out original sources and pore over ponderous books to gather authoritative information on these subjects. While much has been written, many such books are rendered unintelligible to some readers because of the fact that they are encumbered with theological abstractions and tedious doctrinal discussions.

This little volume has been written with an idea that it may appeal to the vast numbers of laymen who honestly desire a better acquaintance with their Church.

It is to be hoped that in both its arrangement and treatment it will be found to fill a long felt need that will give it a general circulation among our Methodist people.

The author gratefully acknowledges the generous commendations contained in the introductions by Bishop William Fraser McDowell (Methodist Episcopal Church) and Bishop Edwin D. Mouzon (Methodist Episcopal Church, South).

GEORGE STANLEY FRAZER.

MARCH, 1922.

Introductions

THERE are several ways of approaching the study of Methodism. It may be approached through its history, through its polity, through its doctrines, or through its personalities. There are people who have so overemphasized and misunderstood what are regarded as Methodism's peculiar features that they have utterly missed the real meaning of the movement itself. A study of its history will not disclose such eccentricities as many people imagine. It was not a freak movement in the religious world. It came into the religious life of the world, when it came, in many respects just as Christianity came, or, later, as the Reformation came. The study of its polity does not reveal what many uninformed persons mistakenly think, that the Methodists set out to invent an ecclesiastical organization unlike anything else. Its organization was born in its historical development, experience,

and purpose. The study of its doctrines does not reveal doctrinal excesses, vagaries, and extravagances, as many uninformed people imagine. The doctrinal development of Methodism was as philosophical and psychological as the development of Protestantism itself.

Methodism did not set out to make a new system of theology, and its theological contribution must not be regarded as though it had. It laid hold of those vital phases and features of Christian experience which most closely related themselves to life. And the doctrines upon which it has laid emphasis consequently are those which relate living men and women to the Living God through the direct and immediate activity of the Holy Spirit in human life. So with the personalities of the Church. They have been such personalities as would have arisen to create such a history, to use such truths, and work such a polity as make up Methodism. They have been also such personalities as such a movement would produce.

I wish people did not so largely feel that

INTRODUCTIONS

Methodism is so peculiar as to be hard to understand. It really is most easily understood when approached in the right manner. These studies constitute a very admirable and successful attempt to interpret vital Methodism to our time. Just as Christianity itself needs to be restated to each succeeding generation, not because it is difficult but because it is alive, so Methodism needs to be restated, not because it is hard to understand but because it is a living force. I am glad to say these words of introduction and to commend to the careful study of all persons into whose hands this little volume may fall such a study of essential Methodism as will lead to a true understanding of it.

WILLIAM FRASER MCDOWELL.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

IT is not too much to say that the Great Revival under the leadership of John Wesley was the most far-reaching revival of evangelical religion in the history of the

Christian Church. John Richard Green, the historian of the English people, goes so far as to say that "the Methodists themselves were the least result of the Methodist movement." One might well question the accuracy of that statement. But certain it is that the results of the Methodist revival went far beyond the Methodist Church, and reach now to the ends of the earth. So that if one is not a member of the Methodist Church, but is interested in such movements as affect society fundamentally, one will be interested in every fresh study of Methodism.

For myself, I welcome a revival of the study of the history and doctrines and government of the Methodist Church. Few things are more needed just now. John Wesley and those associated with him laid stress always on things of first importance. Those first Methodists were so certain of the things of the spirit, that they gave little time to things that do not really matter. One wonders nowadays, when one sees certain brethren go greatly

agitated over matters that do not touch the heart of spiritual religion, if these good people have ever for themselves, in their own heart of hearts, entered into the Christian experience which made Methodism, and for the preservation of which God seems specially to have called the Methodist Church into being. The fact is, much passes for Methodism to-day that is not Methodism at all.

I welcome, therefore, the publication of this little book. The author has proved himself to be a true interpreter of the spirit and genius of Methodism. This book shows a vast amount of reading in this special field, and a clear insight into the significance of history, the meaning of doctrine, and the value of institutions. This book will be of service not only to our young people, but also to our busy laymen who desire to become better Christians and better Methodists. To all such I most heartily commend it. It is to be hoped that it will lead many who read it to undertake for themselves original study of the source books of Methodism.

All study of this kind invariably freshens our faith and sends us forth with renewed determination to "spread Scriptural holiness over these lands."

EDWIN D. MOUZON.

TULSA, OKLA.

METHODISM

I

Its History

IN order to form a proper estimate of the Methodist movement, one must understand something of the character of the times that made it necessary. The leaders in the founding of Methodism had no desire to establish a new faith, but rather to revive a dying one. The times in which Methodism arose were in sore want. The history of religion in England since Augustine and his company entered Canterbury twelve hundred years before, shouting, "Lord, save this guilty city!" had been like the history of English politics—a tale of strife. The two hundred years following the breach between Henry VIII and Rome had been a period of constant struggle.

While there were many fine examples of personal devotion to Christ, the life of the

Church of England had fallen into a period of spiritual darkness and desolation. The dramas of Congreve, the accepted standards of the day, the prevalence of indolence and intolerance show to what depths of vileness society had fallen. At the close of the seventeenth century England was on the way to an apparent rejection of Christianity by all the circles of fashion, learning, and nobility. It was during this period that Bishop Butler, one of the great thinkers of the day, said: "Christianity seems at length to have been found out to be fictitious." The utterances of other thoughtful men in the Church of England of that period were despondent. Bishop Burnett said: "I see ruin hanging over the Church"; and one year before the rise of Methodism, Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote: "Christianity is ridiculed with very little reserve, and the teachers of it with none at all." But the extremity of men was God's opportunity. While doleful prelates sat in their castles, with scarce a ray of hope surviving, a great reformer and

leader was being prepared in the providence of God—"a man sent from God whose name was John"—to rescue his Church from a dead formalism and make glad the hearts of men with the tidings of salvation.

John Wesley

JOHN WESLEY, the founder of the Methodist movement, was born in 1703 at Epworth, in Lincolnshire, the son of the Rev. Samuel Wesley and Susanna Annesley Wesley. He came of a long line of distinguished ancestry, dating back to Baron William de Wellesley, member of Parliament in 1339. After receiving his education at Oxford University, Samuel Wesley served as chaplain on a British man-of-war and later as rector of Epworth. Susanna Wesley was the daughter of Dr. Samuel Annesley, one of the leading dissenting ministers of his day. She was a woman of unusual endowment and attainment. She knew Greek, Latin, and French, and was possessed of rare strength of mind and

character. Bishop McTyeire, one of the greatest authorities on Methodist history, said that Susanna Wesley transmitted to her son John "her genius for learning, for order, for government, and, I might also say, for godliness."

In 1720 John Wesley entered Oxford University. Despite its fame as a seat of learning, the atmosphere of Oxford was favorable to neither intellectual nor spiritual development. Fitchett said: "It had no enthusiasms even for athletics. It was the home of insincerity, idleness, and the vices bred of such qualities." But there is no evidence that Wesley fell into the loose ways that characterized his fellow students, and during his college days he made a profound impression on his fellow students as a man of rare classical taste, of liberal and manly sentiments, and of marked skill in logic. Shortly following his graduation he was elected Fellow in Lincoln College, Oxford, and at the age of twenty-three was elected Greek lecturer and moderator of the classes. In

the year 1727 he received his Master's degree and returned to his home in Epworth to become his father's curate. But the environment of Epworth was unattractive, and after two years he returned to Oxford on the urgent call of the university authorities. During the six years following he presided at the Moderations (public debates) and delivered daily lectures.

While serving at Epworth, Wesley had begun to cultivate systematic habits of devotion, and on returning to Oxford he gathered about him a small group of young men of like mind. They assembled at stated times for prayer and religious conversation, pledging themselves to help one another in leading stricter lives than were commonly practiced among their fellow students. The little group began to attract attention and soon became the target of the wit and cynicism of their fellow students. But they continued in prayer and study, prosecuting their high resolve with such earnest diligence that a witty student dubbed them "Methodists," a

name destined to acquire historic significance in the years to come.

Following the death of his father, John Wesley, having been offered the place of chaplain for the colony in Georgia by General Oglethorpe, sailed for America in company with his brother Charles. Various estimates have been placed on Wesley's work in the Georgia colony, but while the people were impressed with his preaching, his High Church views and practices caused his influence to wane, and he returned to England. On Wednesday, May 24, 1738, he attended services at St. Paul's in London. During the service he was deeply impressed with the anthem: "Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord." In speaking of an event in the evening of the same day, he said: "I went unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine o'clock, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt

that I did trust Christ alone for salvation and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins—even mine." Lecky said that that meeting in Aldersgate "forms an epoch in English history." In tracing the course of his spiritual development, one can see that Wesley's life until this time had been rather self-centered. His faith had been more of a following of a system than a fellowship with a Person. With the realization of a new force in his life, he went to Germany to be thrown in the pious association of Moravian friends. Returning to England eager to labor in the Master's vineyard, he ministered to the convicts in London prisons, gave religious instructions in private houses, and preached in the Established Church until the doors were closed to him.

Growth of the Methodist Movement

ANY statement of the rise and growth of Methodism, however brief, would be in error were it to fail in according to George Whitefield his rightful place. Whitefield was one of the group of young Oxford students who were variously known as "Methodists" and the "Holy Club." He was endowed with a marvelous power of eloquence. While Wesley was in America, Whitefield had startled England by his preaching. The movement with which his name was associated along with that of Wesley had fallen more and more under the suspicion of the authorities of the Church of England. Finding the way blocked in London, Whitefield set out for Bristol, only to find the doors of the church closed to him there. Four miles northwest of Bristol and adjacent to coal mines was a tract of country called Kingswood. It was a neglected area covered with squalid huts of miners. The authorities had provided the inhabitants of this territory with neither churches nor schools. Seeing the condition of these neglected

peoples, Whitefield's sympathies were aroused, and disregarding the rules of the Established Church, he preached to thousands of these miners in the open fields. Whitefield then sent an urgent request to Wesley to come to Bristol to preach to these people. Yielding to Whitefield's importunities, Wesley arrived at Bristol, and seeing the multitudes eager to hear the message and wandering as sheep without a shepherd, he laid aside all ecclesiastical obstacles and preached to the neglected masses, his preaching being attended with a remarkable manifestation of heavenly power. After his experience with field preaching, Wesley wrote these memorable words: "I look upon all the world as my parish—thus far, I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the tidings of salvation. This is the work to which I know God has called me, and sure I am that his blessing attends."

As a result of the labors of Wesley and Whitefield, the Methodist movement as-

sumed broader proportions, and at Bristol the first Methodist church was planned and built. But before the Bristol church was opened for worship, John Wesley had purchased the old foundry near Moorfields, a building that was used by the British government for the molding of cannon. The foundry was subsequently remodeled and became the cradle of Methodism, the first Methodist church ever opened for worship.

In speaking of the origin of the organized Church, Mr. Wesley wrote: "In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons came to me in London and desired that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come. This was the rise of the United Society" (Methodist movement). The meetings of these societies were characterized by prayer, teaching, love feasts, and conferences. Even at this time Mr. Wesley had no idea of the formation of a separate Church, and reaffirmed his loyalty to the Established Church, and disclaimed any thought of

separation. But the hand of Providence was shaping the new movement, giving it light and strength, and the achievment of a task greatly needed to be done. Methodism began to command the attention of the influential, and with the aid of the Countess of Huntington, and others of rank and wealth, chapels were built, schools were established, and the movement spread to distant fields.

Methodism in America

WITH the tide of immigration from the Old World to America, there was planted in the colonies the seed of intolerance and religious persecution, but in 1785 Jefferson's Bill for Religious Freedom became a law. This law dealt the most effective blow to the opposition encountered by the early Methodists in the colonies. But even earlier the new movement had gained a footing. Robert Strawbridge, a native of Drumsna, Ireland, was converted under the preaching of John Wesley. About 1760 he settled on Sam's Creek, in

Maryland, and opened his house for preaching. A log meeting house was built a few years later near his house. This building, thirty miles northwest of Baltimore, is called by many "the cradle of American Methodism." Other authorities claim that the first congregation was organized in New York at the house of Philip Embury, which soon proved too small for the rapidly growing congregation, and new quarters were secured in the old rigging loft on William Street. Captain Webb, a brave soldier who had served with Wolfe at Quebec, assisted Embury in carrying forward the work, with the result that Wesley Chapel was built on John Street and opened for worship in October, 1768. Unlike other churches, the Methodist chapel had a chimney, to avoid the law that forbade dissenting churches being built in the city.

In 1771 Francis Asbury, called "the Apostle of American Methodism," came to America in company with Richard Wright. Wright returned later to England, and Asbury was left in charge of the

work in the colonies and the appointment of the preachers, subject to Wesley's supervision. Asbury traveled up and down the Atlantic seaboard, organizing societies and establishing preaching chapels. In 1784 Thomas Coke, Doctor of Laws of Oxford, came to America by the appointment of Wesley to assume supervision of the work with Asbury. In the same year the Methodist Episcopal Church was formally organized at a conference held in Baltimore. At this conference Coke and Asbury were elected bishops, or general superintendents.

American Methodism remained as a single organization, under the direction of one General Conference, until 1844. The fires of controversy which enveloped the whole nation and found expression in the Civil War, began to rage in the Church itself. The General Conference of 1844 gave full and exclusive authority to the "Annual Conferences in the slave-holding States" to decide upon the necessity of organizing a separate ecclesiastical connection in the South. A separation was

duly and legally effected, and American Methodism was divided into two distinct ecclesiastical bodies—the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, both bodies remaining essentially one in doctrine and practice.

II

Its Teaching

THE Methodist movement was distinctively spiritual, and not at all doctrinal in its teaching. It arose as a protest against cold formalism in theology, ritual, and practice. It made no warfare on other Christian bodies except in so far as they lacked true spiritual expression. It placed its entire emphasis on inner experience—the life of God in the soul of man. Wesley declared over and over again that a Methodist was not one who had a certain set of opinions, but one who lived a certain kind of life. He was among the first of modern leaders to insist that men ought to live together in Christian fellowship and to coöperate in Christian service on the simple basis of faith in Jesus Christ.

In his Journal, under date of August 26, 1789, Wesley speaks of the broad foundation on which Methodism is building, and describes it as a Church "which requires of its members no conformity either in

opinion or modes or worship, but barely this one thing—to fear God and work righteousness." In another place he writes: "Is man a believer in Jesus Christ, and is his life suitable to his profession? are not only the main but the sole inquiries I make in order to his admission into our society."

Still it is not to be inferred from Wesley's broad spirit of tolerance that he was of the company of those who hold that matters of belief in the sphere of religion are of minor importance. No man had a clearer insight into the great fundamentals of Scriptural doctrine than Wesley had, nor has anyone proclaimed the essential truths of faith with more convincing power.

The Apostles' Creed

THE Apostles' Creed, which is embraced in the "Order of Worship" of thousands of Methodist Churches, expresses the fundamental belief of Methodism as it does of other Christian bodies.

The creed represents the substance of the faith of the Church. It was not written by the apostles, but it summarizes their teachings and is a compendium of the chief facts of Christianity, drawn up in a systematic and authoritative form. This creed can be traced in its simplest form to the second century, but in its developed form it stands as it was shaped by the debates and definitions of Christian councils. All creeds owe their origin to the necessities of worship and the instinct of public confession. The early Christians formed the habit when they met of reciting their common faith, and this recitation assumed a fixed rhythmical form. The Apostles' Creed as Methodists recite it defines what the Christian Church has always understood to be the mind of the Scriptures on certain points.

The Apostles' Creed, together with an interpretation of its meaning, will enable us to better understand this great, historic statement of Christian faith:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."—

METHODISM

The New Testament emphasizes the universal Fatherhood of God. All that the relation of an earthly father to his children involves, Jesus has affirmed of God in his relation to men. To God we owe our existence, from him we borrow his nature and likeness. He provides for our wants, he educates and disciplines us, he is graciously disposed to forgive our offenses, and he makes us heirs of eternal life. God is the Father of Jesus Christ and the Father of all his creatures. God is almighty. He is present everywhere and powerful above all other gods. He rules not only his people, those who trust him, but he rules all the nations of the earth. He is the Maker of heaven and earth. The world originated in the will of God. He is the absolute Sovereign over the material universe. The silent multitude of the stars, the glow of the sunrise and the sunset, the deep blue of the arched sky—these are the handiwork of God. The whiteness of the snow, the rolling seas, the majesty of the mountains, the far-extending plains, the song of the birds, the beauty of form in a

wayside flower—these are silent witnesses of God's creative hand. Indeed, the physical beauty of the world is—

"An endless fountain of immortal drink
Pouring into us from heaven's brink."

"And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord."—Jesus calls himself not a son, but *the* Son. He chose to express his views of his person by this term. The mutual relation existing between the Father and the Son is a perfect one. Not only is the Father's nature open to Jesus, without that sense of mystery that characterized the vision of prophet and saint, but in like manner the innermost nature of Jesus is open only to the Father. Jesus stands to God in a relation of intimacy such as no other can share. He possesses the privileges and fulfills the obligations of Sonship. His death was the means of procuring for us the highest blessings in his Father's kingdom, and he is our Lord and Master possessed of authority in that kingdom.

"Who was conceived by the Holy

Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."—In the narrative of Matthew and Luke there is perfect agreement that Jesus was miraculously conceived and that he was born in Bethlehem, as the Christmas story is known. The great body of professing Christians can agree with the scholarly Dr. Macintosh, of New College, Edinburgh, in the statement that the supernatural conception is a "befitting and credible preface to a life that was crowned by resurrection from the dead," and "that an abnormal fact in the sphere of nature should answer to the transcendent spiritual element in the person of Christ is both a scriptural and profoundly philosophical thought."

"Suffered under Pontius Pilate."—The Jews brought against Jesus a charge of blasphemy, saying that he had attacked sacred institutions. They appealed to Jesus to answer if he claimed to be the Christ. Jesus answered, "I am." The claim was forthwith declared to amount to blasphemy, and he was condemned to be worthy of death. The Jews took the

position that in a case of this kind it was the duty of the Roman governor to sustain their judgment. But seeing the difficulty of securing the death sentence on the religious charge of blasphemy, they resorted to the political charge of treason, saying: "We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and saying he himself is Christ, a king." Then Pilate, the Roman governor, sought to evade responsibility, but the Jews threatened to complain to the higher Roman authorities that Pilate had not supported them in stamping out treason. Pilate was unwilling that his administration should undergo investigation, and to satisfy the popular clamor, pronounced Jesus guilty of sedition as the pretended king of the Jews, and delivered him to be crucified.

"Was crucified, dead, and buried."—When the sentence was pronounced by Pilate, Jesus was scourged, dressed with mock emblems of royalty, and led forth to Golgotha to be crucified. Crucifixion was the form of death by torture which was

reserved by the Romans for slaves and rebels. In the agony of death, Jesus prayed for those who had crucified him. The last words spoken on the cross were: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." There were friends of Jesus who, though unable to resist the wild will of the mob, were able to gain possession of the body. With the permission of the authorities Joseph of Arimathæa removed the body from the cross, wrapped it in a cloth of linen, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb, the entrance of which was closed by a great stone, and the stone was sealed and a guard set over the tomb.

"The third day he rose again from the dead."—Here is the fact of the Easter story. No incident in the annals of history is more certain than that the disciples of Jesus believed that he rose from the tomb in which he was buried, and at intervals he met and conversed with them in different places. On this fact rests the existence of the Christian Church. The scattered and disheartened followers of Jesus could never have found a rallying

point around one who was condemned and crucified as a criminal, had they not believed that God had owned him and accredited his divine mission in raising him from the dead. Blackstone, the great English lawyer, says: "No event in history is more amply substantiated by competent testimony than the resurrection of Jesus."

"He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead."— The scene of the ascension was the Mount of Olives, and was the uplifting of the bodily form of Jesus from the earth until it disappeared in a cloud and returned to the Father. "An eternal character is thus given to the sacrifice of the death of Christ, which becomes efficacious through the exaltation of his crucified and risen manhood" (Dr. James G. Simpson, Prin. Clergy School, Leeds). Having reassumed the glory which he had with the Father, Jesus sits on the right hand of the Father, the place of honor and

authority. And from thence he shall come to conquer the powers of evil, and to judge the quick (the living) and the dead.

"I believe in the Holy Ghost."—Before he went away, Jesus gave promise of a Comforter, who will convict the world of sin and of judgment and will guide in the ways of truth. The Holy Ghost, or the Holy Spirit, is God, a Person within the Godhead. He was in the world before God clothed him in the incarnation. He is the life-giving presence in the world and in the Church. He is the life of God in the individual, convicting of sin; mediating to him forgiveness and new life; nourishing and purifying his whole personality, and bringing him to the fullness of eternal life.

"The holy catholic Church."—All the great creeds of Christendom have contained declarations of their belief in the Church. The expression "Holy Catholic Church" means the universal Church of Jesus Christ. "Catholic" is derived from a Greek word meaning whole, universal,

entire. In the sense used here it has no reference to the Roman Church, of which the pope of Rome is head. When we profess our belief in the "Holy Catholic Church" we mean the Church of Jesus Christ extending throughout the world, and embracing as its teaching the accepted word of God.

"The communion of saints."—This refers to the society of the professed followers of Jesus, or the fellowship of those who are consecrated to the service of God.

"The forgiveness of sins."—The Scriptures teach that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"; "there is none righteous." Sin is the transgression of the law of God. We sin by thought, word, and deed. Men in every age have cried out, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Christianity has an answer to that cry. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." A sense of sin, a penitent spirit, and a vital faith in Christ are

the essential factors in God's forgiveness of sin.

"The resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting."—The question that has haunted the human race from the dawn of time is whether man shall live on the other side of death. The vast majority of thinkers in all times have held to the belief that the soul survives death. Jesus says: "Because I live, ye shall live also." Our glorified bodies will share in the general resurrection on the last day. It is inconceivable to think that man, with his affections, capabilities, and yearnings, shall lie down and die as the dumb beast of the field.

Tennyson sums up the intuitions of the race in his "In Memoriam":

"Thou wilt not leave us in the dust;
Thou madest man, he knows not why,
He thinks he was not made to die;
And thou hast made him: thou art just."

ITS TEACHING

Conversion

AMONG the essential teachings of Methodism, first emphasis must be placed on conversion, or the "new birth," which means the entrance of the soul into the family of God. Mr. Wesley did not attempt to advance any theory of conversion apart from its commonly accepted scriptural meaning. Conversion has been defined as "the process, gradual or sudden, by which a soul hitherto divided, and consciously wrong and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right and happy, by its firmer hold upon divine reality." As such it is no other than the commencement of the life of Christ in the life of man. It is the acceptance of that spiritual gift of God appropriated to our own life.

Conversion may take many forms and may be wrought in us in different ways. While it is true this experience with the majority of the early Methodists came in some great emotional upheaval, it cannot be questioned that with many devoted followers of Christ it has come in the slow dawning of a faith that is as certain as

life itself. God has many gates by which he finds his way into the heart, and he speaks to men in different languages. Methodism does not limit its idea of conversion to one form or experience.

The Witness of the Spirit

ANOTHER doctrine of the Holy Scriptures which Methodism emphasizes is "the witness of the Spirit." It has been defined as that "testimony or inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me and given himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out, and that I am reconciled to God." The Holy Spirit is spoken of as a seal, and the purpose of a seal is to give evidence. The Spirit is the witness of the saving work of God in the soul of man.

Methodists hold to the belief that when the Christian is doing the will of God, the Spirit affords satisfactory evidences of salvation, or that one living in possession

of spiritual health has an abundant testimony of that possession. It must not be concluded that the same fullness or degree of emotional fervor would be present at all times with all peoples in all ages of history. In the stormy days that witnessed the birth of the Methodist movement great emotional outbursts were common in public gatherings, but the same type of emotionalism is not so prevalent in our day as in earlier times. Still, the voice of God is unmistakably clear in every changing century, and to-day the "Spirit bears witness" in unmistakable tones, and by this testimony we can still know that we are the children of God.

Christian Perfection

A THIRD doctrine on which Mr. Wesley and the early Methodists placed emphasis is "Christian perfection," variously spoken of in different places as "entire sanctification," "perfect love," or "perfect holiness." Perfection is the ideal for which every Christian must strive.

The Sermon on the Mount is a picture of moral and spiritual perfection. In this we have a portrayal of the completed work of God's grace. It is that health of soul that issues forth in spiritual beauty and grace, frees it from the bonds of sense and selfishness, and brings it into right and wholesome and happy relationship with God and life and its fellow souls.

Mr. Wesley's own account of his teaching on this subject guards against misunderstanding and abuse. He did not teach some impossible attainment, one that excludes progress in the Christian life and makes falling away impossible, one that is independent of watchfulness and prayer. He did not hold that Christian perfection is exemption from error or infirmity or temptation, but that it is the complete sovereignty in the life of the principle of love —love to God and love to man. He warned his followers against fanaticism and undue haste in professing the experience of perfect love. In the profession of perfection and of every other Christian grace the Master has given the final test:

"By their fruits ye shall know them." The Methodist ideal of perfection is one with the ideal given in the New Testament: "Be ye perfect, even as the Father in heaven is perfect."

The Sacraments

METHODISM, in company with the majority of Christians, recognizes only two sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper. The term "sacrament" is derived from *sacramentum*, the oath of a Roman soldier when he enlisted in the army. A sacrament is an outward sign of spiritual truth, or, to use the phraseology of the Wesleyan Catechism, it is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us." A sacrament is of value only as it helps us to a realization of spiritual truth. The sacraments are not only badges or tokens of our professions, but they are signs of grace and of God's good will toward us. They are representative of our union with Christ. As baptism corresponds to the birth into

the life of Christ, the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, is the food by which we are nourished and sustained.

Baptism

BAPTISM is a seal of the relation into which the individual has been brought with God. When we are baptized with water, it is to signify the cleansing and forgiveness of our sins; and in the "name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" declares the divine source of that cleansing. Just as a king receives his crown at his coronation, so the Christian receives the rite of baptism as a token of forgiveness and entrance into the family of God.

When performed in the case of adults, baptism is a seal of conversion accomplished; with infants it is an act of dedication to God and a prophecy of conversion to come—a prophecy that is to be accomplished through instruction, example, and counsel of Christian parents and friends. Jesus blessed the little chil-

dren and commanded them to be brought to him, and Methodism holds with other Christian Churches that children are the proper subjects for baptism. The form—whether sprinkling, pouring, or immersion—is indifferent, and that form or mode might be varied according to custom and convenience without impairing the meaning of the sacred rite.

The Lord's Supper

THE Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, was instituted by Jesus in the company of his disciples just before the crucifixion. It is accepted by Christians everywhere as a memorial or a commemoration of his sacrifice for our redemption. It is also the badge of membership in the Church of Christ and a renewal of our Christian profession. Every part of the Lord's Supper is significant. The broken bread is symbolic of the slain body, the wine of the shed blood, and the eating and drinking represents the living faith which unites the believer with his

Lord. "The body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner; and the means whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper, in faith." (Methodist Article of Religion XVIII.) The Holy Communion becomes nothing more than an empty form to one who does not conceive of it as an aspiration and progress towards oneness with Christ. It must also be the fresh reminder of the humanity of Christ—that humanity, divinely spiritual, through which his sacrificial death crushed the whole power of sin.

III

Its Government

THE government of Methodism possesses a characteristic that has been the admiration of peoples of all religious bodies—the guarantee to every Church a pastor and to every active pastor a pulpit. Such a rule could not obtain in any system of Church government other than a connectionalism. With the organization of every congregation into a Methodist Church there follows the understanding that the administrative authorities of the Church will appoint a suitable person to direct the spiritual growth of that congregation. And with the admission of a minister into membership in an Annual Conference, the understanding is equally clear that that minister will receive an appointment to some Church or group of Churches.

A thorough confidence in the justice and integrity of the administrative authorities of the Church is essential to the per-

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petuity of such a system, since the individual congregation foregoes the privilege of selecting its minister, and the minister, himself, surrenders the right to choose the field in which he shall labor. Methodism lays no claim to infallibility in operation. Like every other institution on earth, it is subject to the imperfections and mistakes common to humanity. But when one considers the fact that its thousands of ministers are appointed or reappointed annually to their respective fields, and the almost negligible number of cases where readjustment in appointments is necessary, it is no wonder that the operation of the system is regarded as a marvel.

The organization of Methodism includes the local Church, the ministry, and a system of Conferences.

The local Church is ordinarily a single congregation with its own pastor and official board. In many localities two or more Churches are grouped together as a "circuit" under the administration of one pastor and official board. Each Church or group of Churches is practically in-

dependent in the conduct of its financial affairs, but in its relation to the general work it is subject to the ecclesiastical system. The laity of the Church is represented in all the Conferences of the Church, administrative, legislative, and judicial.

The Ministry

THE Methodist ministry is composed of two orders—deacons and elders. The terms have come down to us from the practices and phraseology of the Apostolic Church. The Greek word *diakonos* (translated "servant" or "minister") denoted one who was intrusted with certain duties and privileges. Hence it came to be applied to a special officer in the early Church. This term has the same significance in Methodism, and refers to those in the ministry of the Church who, after a specified period of service and examination in a prescribed course of study, are ordained by a bishop. A deacon has the authority to solemnize matrimony, administer baptism, and assist in the ad-

ministration of the Lord's Supper. After serving for two years as a deacon and with the completion of an advanced course of study, a minister becomes eligible to election and ordination as an elder, and as such has the authority to consecrate the elements of the Lord's Supper. Elders represent the highest order in the Church and are eligible to appointment or election to any office in the Church.

The Presiding Eldership, or District Superintendency

ONE of the distinctive features of the Methodist system is the presiding eldership, or district superintendency. They are terms variously used to denote those intrusted with the supervision of the work of the Church in a definite area or district. At the Annual Conference the presiding bishop appoints men from the ranks of the ministry to this office. They visit the Churches in their districts, preside at Quarterly Conferences and District Conferences, represent the bishop in the ad-

ministration of Church affairs, and assist in making the appointments of the ministers to specific Churches. As such the presiding elders form what is known as the bishop's "cabinet."

The Episcopacy

THE episcopacy is an important and instrumental factor in Methodism. Bishops, or general superintendents, as they are sometimes called, are not regarded as belonging to a separate order, but rather as officers who are elected to have general oversight of the religious work of the Church. The term is derived from the Greek word *episkopos*, which means an "overseer" of the flock of Christ. St. Paul reminded the elders of the Church at Ephesus that the Holy Ghost had made them bishops over the flock. A Methodist bishop is elected by the General Conference and consecrated by three bishops, or by one bishop and two elders. It is the duty of a bishop to preside at General Conference and at Annual Conferences,

to make annual appointments to pastoral charges, to ordain deacons and elders, and in general to supervise the work of the Church.

The Conferences

TO a student or an observer of the practices common to Methodism, it is easy to see that the system of Conferences is fundamental in a connectionalism fashioned after the Methodist order. The closest relationship existing among different Conferences and the larger delegated Conferences are but the development of Conferences more local in their character. The same minister or laymen may within a single year appear on the official roll of a Church Conference, a Quarterly Conference, a District Conference, an Annual Conference, and a General Conference. A man may be admitted into membership in an Annual Conference in Maryland and before the Conference has adjourned be assigned by transfer to a Church in California. A minister's membership is in

an Annual Conference, and he may be transferred to some Conference across the continent with the same facility of movement as one changes the place of his Church membership.

The principal Conferences in the Methodist system are Quarterly, District, Annual, and General Conferences.

The Quarterly Conference, as the name indicates, is held quarterly in each pastoral charge and is presided over by the presiding elder, or district superintendent, in whose district the charge is located. Its membership is practically identical with the official board of the local Church or group of Churches composing the pastoral charge. Its function relates to the administration of the affairs of the charge.

The District Conference is composed of traveling and local preachers and duly elected lay representatives within a certain district. It generally meets once a year and reviews the mutual relation of charges and the affairs of the district as a whole.

The Annual Conference is an adminis-

trative body composed of the active and retired ministers within its bounds. Its membership also includes lay representatives elected by the District Conference. The business of an Annual Conference embraces reports from pastoral charges and districts, plans, and reports of missionary, educational, and Sunday school activities; and the election of clerical and lay delegates to the General Conference. At the session of an Annual Conference, the presiding bishop meets his cabinet of presiding elders and arranges the appointment of the ministers to their charges.

The General Conference is the highest body in the Church and is the general legislative and judicial body. It convenes at intervals of four years with a membership made up of an equal number of clerical and lay delegates. The General Conference alone has the right to enact laws and make rules and regulations governing the conduct of the affairs of the Church, and even then it is subject to specific limitations and restrictions written into the fundamental law of the Church. The

General Conference authorizes the organization of Annual Conferences and fixes their boundaries. It elects the bishops, official editors, and secretaries of the several administrative boards of the Church.

In its missionary and educational attainments Methodism has challenged the admiration of the Christian world, and in a decade just past has achieved results far in excess of the fifty years of preceding history. With all its glorious history, Methodism's glory is not altogether in the past. We are yet laboring amid the mists of the morning. It is the rising sun that smites our forehead. Only the future can reveal the glory that is to be. In the United States alone Methodism records a membership of approximately eight millions in its fourteen bodies.

What a graphic realization of the truth that finds expression in the lines engraved on the memorial in Westminster to the founder of Methodism: "God buries his workmen but carries on his work"! Like the walls of Thebes, Methodism is being builded to the sound of heavenly music.